

FORT BOISE - BOISE BARRACKS - BOISE VA

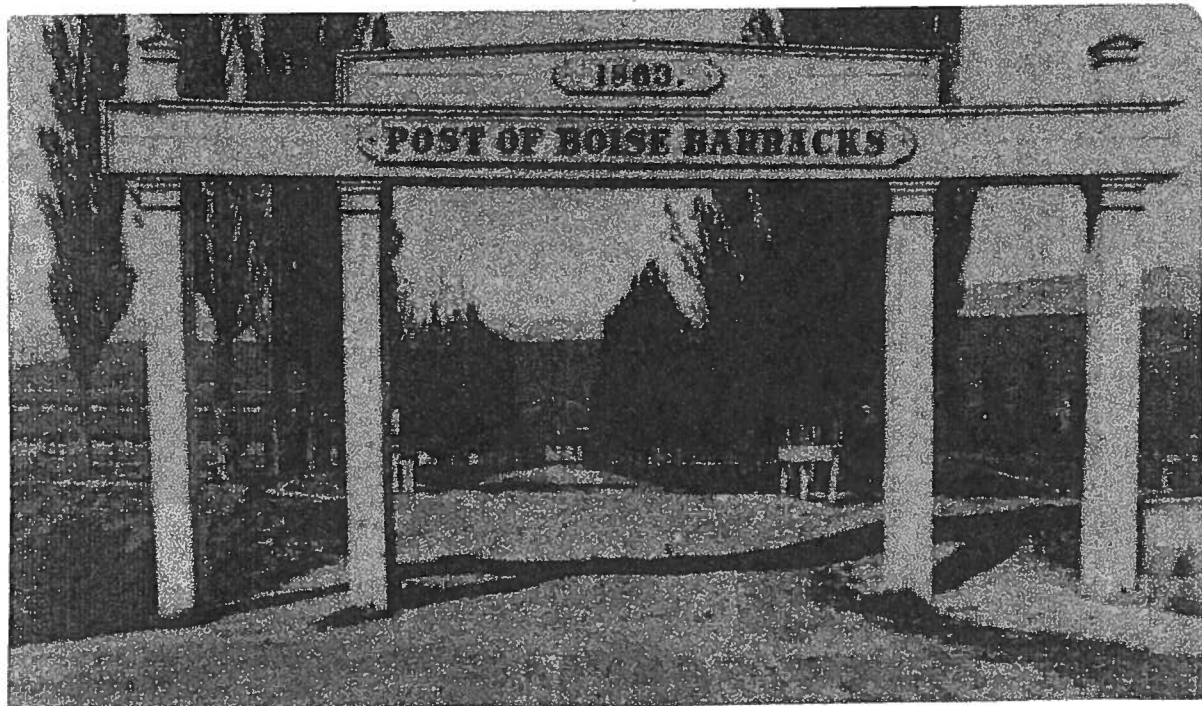
1863 - 2002

This little "historical pictorial" booklet was accomplished not by an individual but by a group. A group of men and women from just about every department at the VA interested in these historic grounds, who helped me find fairly accurate information to display on these pages. All research, compilation, and the end results were done on my personal time as a hobby, to me a very challenging but interesting hobby.

The pictures are from the accumulated collection found or discovered at various sites on the VA campus (with the exception of a few taken by me). All written information was also found at various locations on campus in the form of VA newsletters, notes from previous employees, articles from other employees or students, an Overview, Survey, Evaluation done by AR Consultants and paid for by the VA, Washington DC, and a copy of the Nomination form for National Historic Registry submitted by the Idaho Historical Society they were kind enough to provide me. In my research I found 9 separate articles on the beginnings of "Fort Boise" in our collection, each one slightly different. Some buildings changed numbers 4 times on the schematic maps, a few labeled by name incorrectly. This created quite a challenge for some degree of accuracy. Many of the pictures and articles found on campus had to originate with the Idaho Statesman or the Idaho Historical Society in years past and though unable to identify which ones; I thank them for their contributions. All documents, writings, pictures I found are now safely housed in the Volunteer Services offices.

Of the many co-workers who were a part of this endeavor, at the top of the list would be Carol Mersch, Sharon McCrackin, Teresa Britton, Larry Post, Jim Cochrum, Jane Holt, Walt Thornton, Donna Horner, Patrick Costello, Sherry Pyle, Donna Pickles, Jean Stubbs, Charlene Hetrick, Joanne Leone, Doug Lamb, and the entire Medical Media staff. I sincerely thank each and every one of you for your assistance and support. It's been quite an undertaking but a very interesting and rewarding pleasure.


Bob Yates



The year is 1862, the Civil war has three more years to go, and a huge gold strike is going on in Boise Basin. The powers in Washington DC realize they need to do something about this area to protect the miners in the Basin and immigrants close by on the Oregon Trail from hostile Indians (not true) but most importantly, make sure the gold ends up in federal depositories, not confederate treasuries. Their decision is to construct a fort in the area. The Army dispatches Major Pickney Lugenbeel along with 5 companies who arrive in the area in June 1863, locates the perfect spot that has water, drainage, and cottonwood trees. Close by is the Oregon Trail, and immediately behind the area is the road to the Basin. Fortunately the Major met a Charles May, fresh from England and a highly skilled stone mason looking for work. Construction immediately commenced with Mr. May, soldiers, and what civilians they could find and hire.

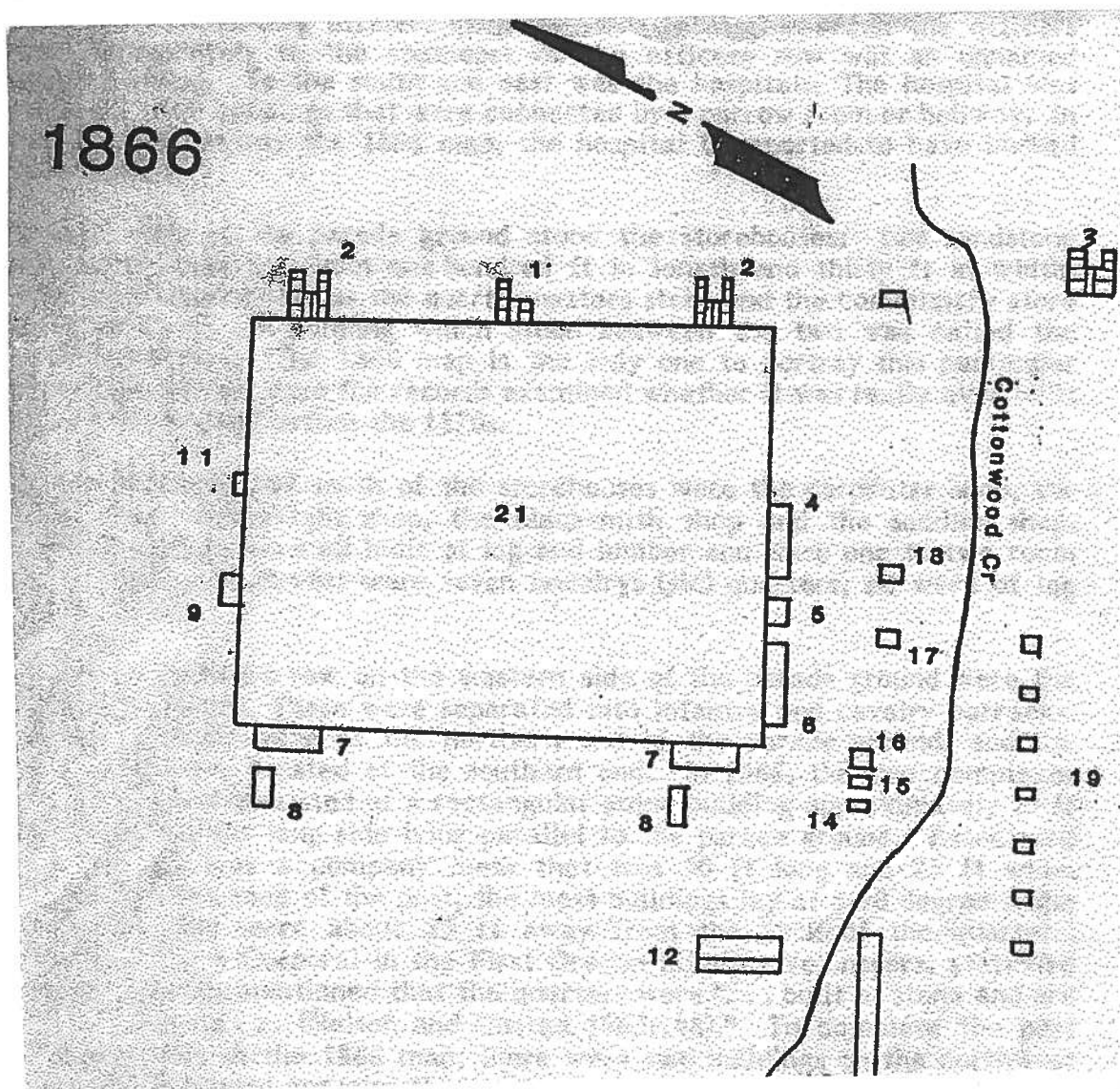
In sequence, number's 1 thru 7 were constructed of stone along with many "temporary" wood, log, and adobe structures. 1864 brought the finishing touches with plastering of inside walls and fitting the porches. We now have "Officer's Row" on the hill, and immediately below it the parade ground measuring about 770 by 520 feet with various sized buildings around it.

The earliest schematic map found of Fort Boise. It provides a perfect visual aid of the original layout of the entire complex. The numbering system used on this map is not the designated building numbers in use today.

An interesting item is the 7 little squares by the letter 19. As was the custom in those days, these are homes for the laundress's and in some cases home to the married enlisted men and noncoms whose wives took in laundry.

Laundress's meager wages were 5 dollars a month for officers, 2 dollars for enlisted men's laundry. Additional duties were serving as midwife for officers wives, nursing the sick, and cheering at the ritual daily guard mounts and treated with utmost respect. For an idea of the size and shape of these log cabins, the O'Farrell cabin by the front gate is a prime example.

Eventually Cottonwood creek was totally diverted away from the post, the log cabins removed, and on this site now are the Idaho State Veterans Home, constructed in 1966 on 5 acres the VA transferred to the State of Idaho.



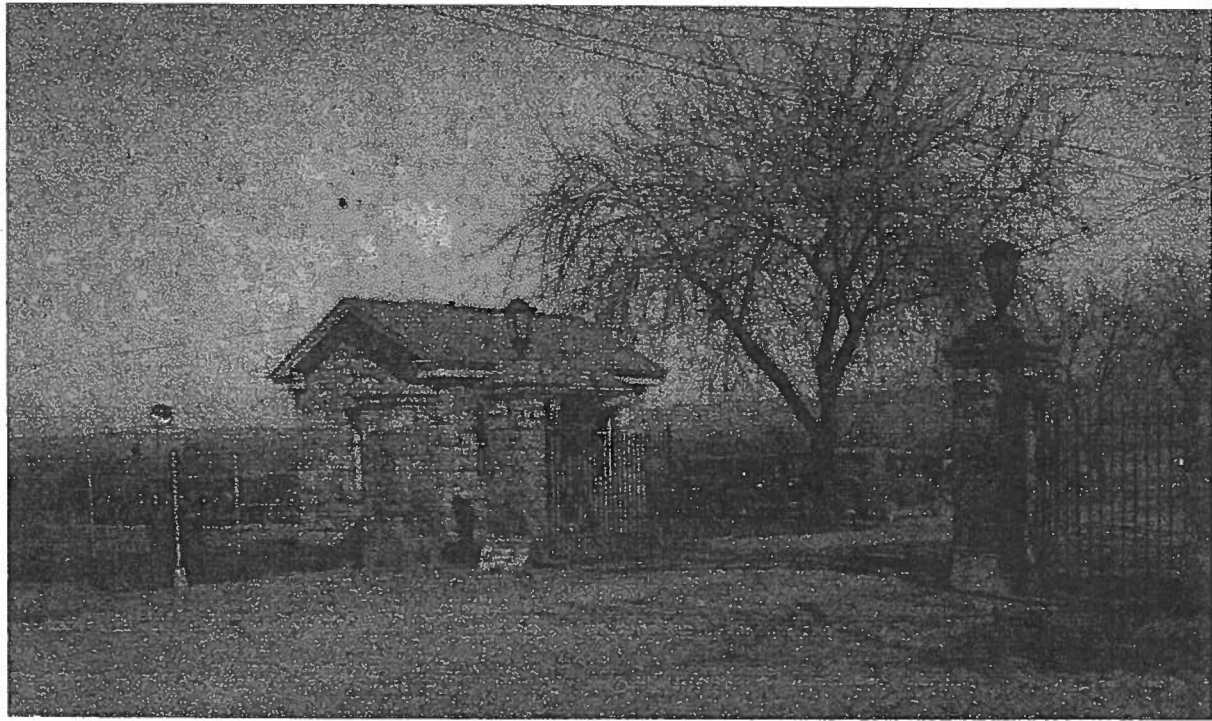


Cavalry Captain in
in full dress. That's
died buffalo hair
attached to his hat

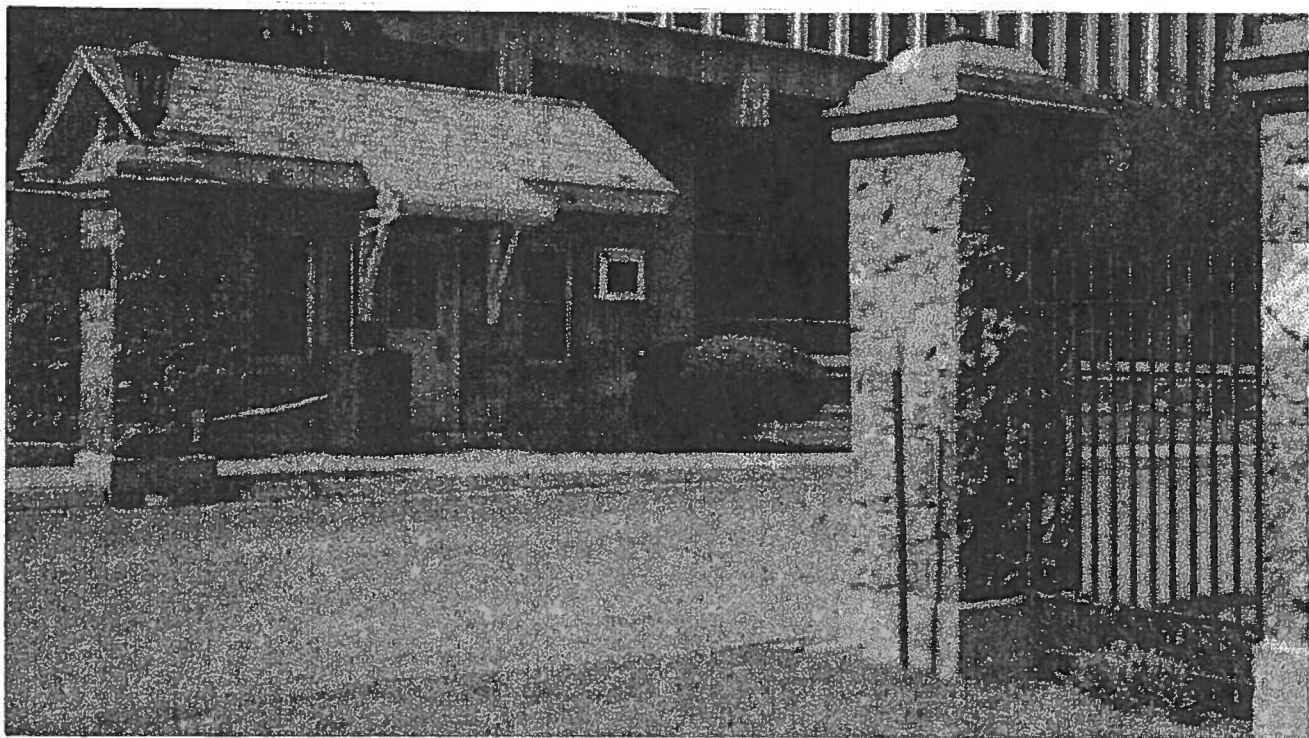


A private foot soldier
in full dress with his
45/70 single-shot rifle

The area by the front gate in 1932 with a large assortment of vehicles in the parking lot. The sign reads
"All vehicles and pedestrians must stop at gate"



Another camera shot 70 years later showing a few changes





A typical day at Fort Boise, June 1870.

Reveille sounded at 5:30 every morning.

First drill at 6:15

At 6:30 for breakfast the soldiers had beef hash, dry sliced bread with nothing on it, and coffee with no milk.

Fallout for fatigue detail 7:30

Guard mount at 8:30

At 12 noon dinner gave the soldiers sliced beef, dry bread, and coffee.


Afternoon fatigue duty commenced at 1:00

Drill at 4:30

Supper was at 6:00 consisting of dry bread and coffee.

Taps occurred at 8:15 that evening.

This routine was established by the commanding officer and dictated by the War Dept in Washington DC. The food was by the Army's hypothetical supply tables never a strong point for them in the 1800's. Of course the soldiers would supplement their rations by pooling their meager wages and purchasing items from merchants and farmers, and if approved by the post commander, use their rifles to add wild game to the diet.



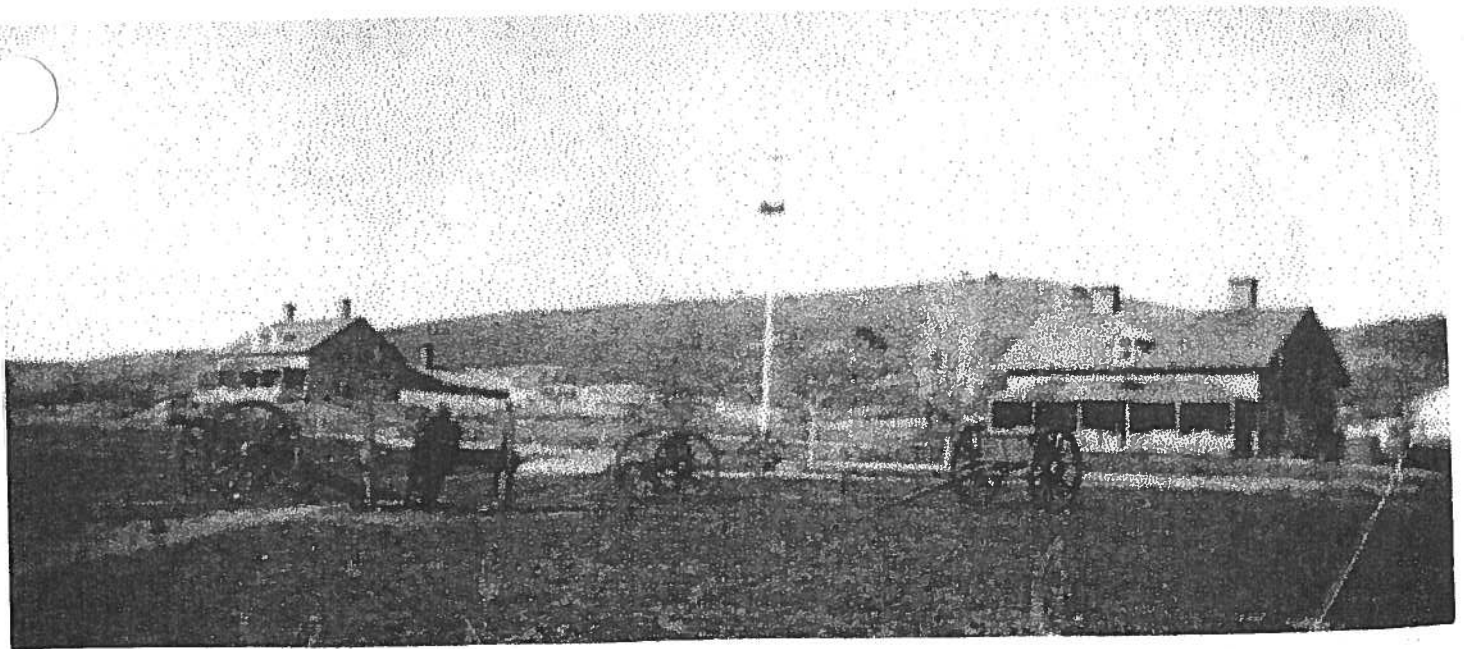
Men's clothing prices from an 1865 advertisement

heavy pants	\$4.75	blanket	\$7.00	pegged shoes	\$2.25
knit shirt	\$2.25	mans blouse	\$4.00	boots, sewed	\$4.65
knit drawers	\$1.75	stockings	\$.48	light pants	\$3.50

More gold has been found in the
Boise Basin then found in the
entire state of Alaska

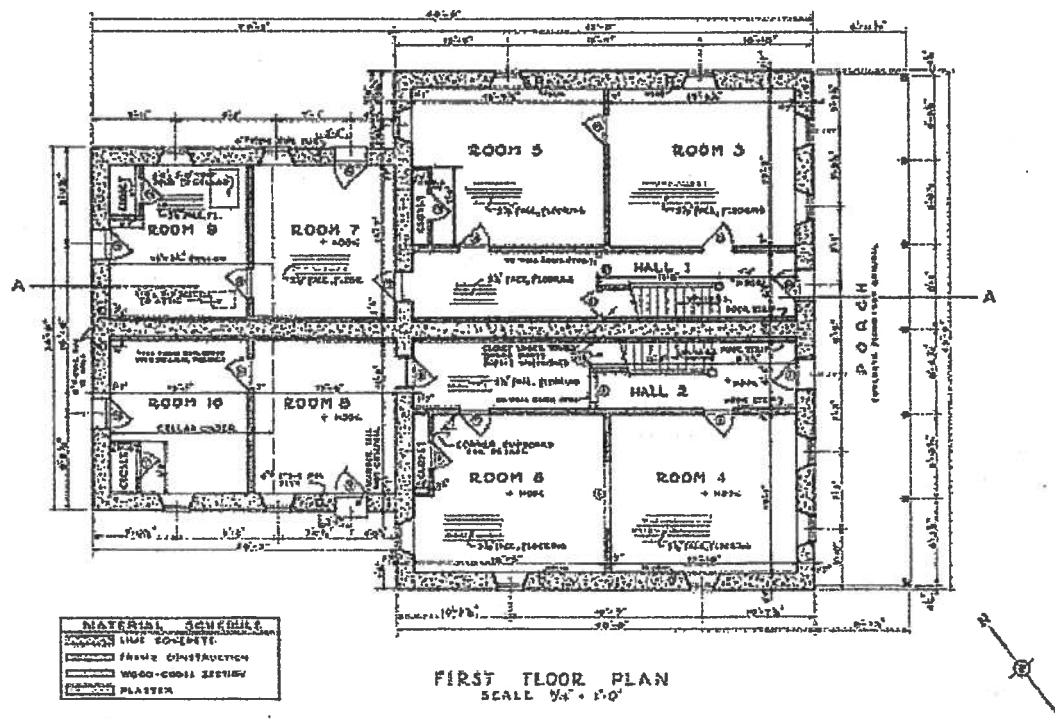
Fact or Fiction.

It seems that a Major and his wife and 5 children were living in one of the structures on "Officers Row" in the 1870's when one of the children became ill. When the child continued to get worse, the major called the post surgeon who came, took one look at the child, shouted the word Smallpox, and raced for the exit, refusing to return and offer any assistance. After the child died the Major wrapped it in a blanket, tying it with the rope from the soldiers who took the body to the post cemetery and lowered it into the grave using the rope. The mother died next, and one by one the remaining children followed her with the soldiers continuing their solemn duty. When the Major fell ill, he wrapped himself in a blanket and lay close to the door to die. After he was buried, the building and contents were burned to the ground. Perhaps this was the original building 5 on Officers Row next to where bldg 23 is now located? There are 7 graves with the same name at the burial site above the fort.



The earliest picture found of "Officers Row". That is building 1 to the right, bldg 2 duplex to the left, wagons and cannon in the middle.

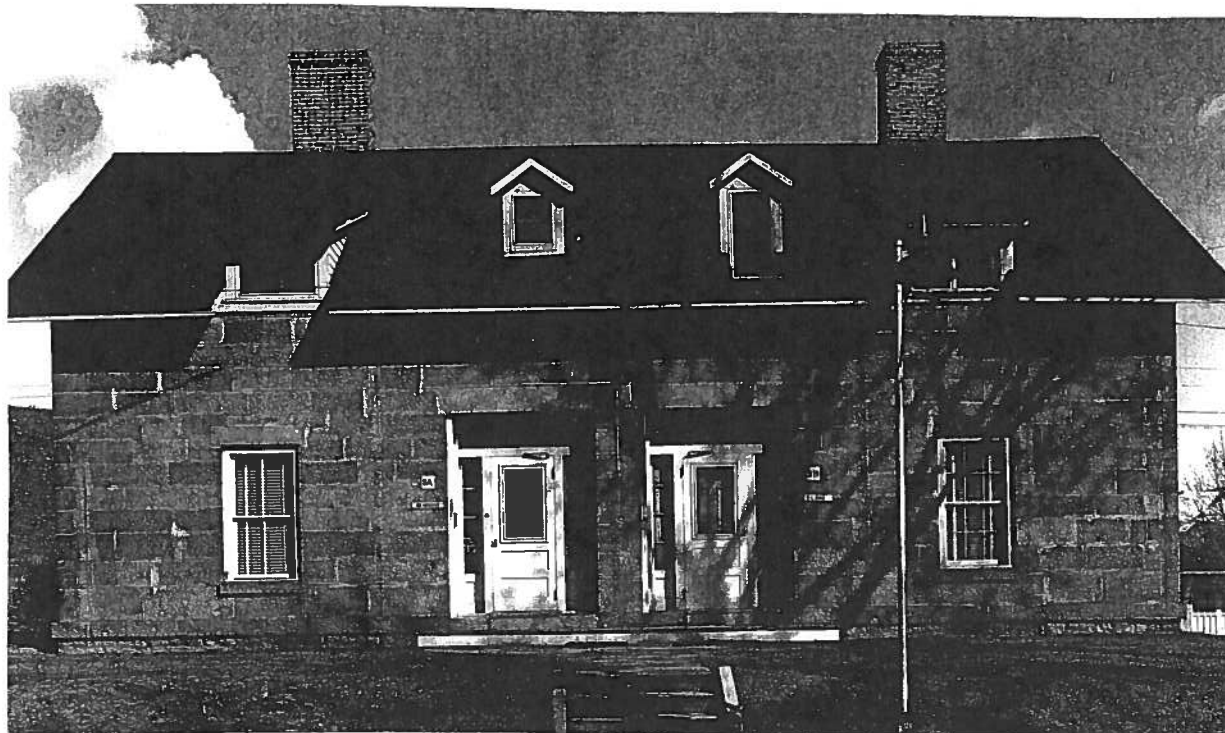
Construction of buildings 2, 3, 4, and 5 plus the start of building 6 and 7 kept soldiers and hired civilians busy for the remainder of 1863. The sandstone was cut and layered similar to our cement blocks of today, construction being the basic 4 outside walls, a bearing inside wall, a few standard size windows and doors, sloped roof, a fireplace or 2 with chimneys and it's done. Standard Government Issue plans allowed construction materials of adobe, wood, rock, or stone, the finished results would be almost identical in room size, style, and shape for most of the residential buildings here and at any other military post. The officers quarters were constructed as duplex's but with very slight modifications could be identical to the commanders quarters in bldg 1. Or, changed into a 4 plex, each officer having a day room and bedroom.



Building 1, the oldest and possibly the most discussed building on campus.

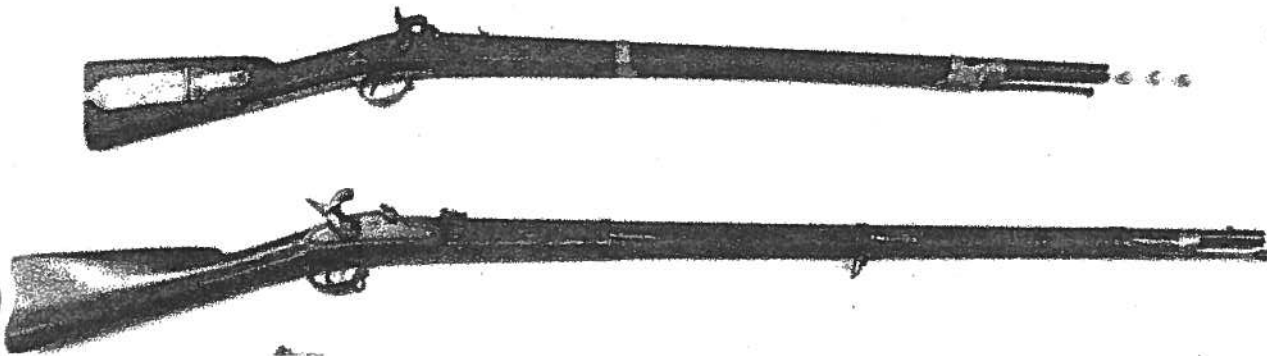
Built expressly for the post commander, it had 4 rooms on the ground floor each measuring 14 ft by 16 ft, with 3 smaller rooms on the 2nd floor. Through the years some slight modifications and additions were made, such as a porch added to the front (faint tar lines are still visible on the sandstone) and later removed in exchange for a small overhead entry, two dormer windows added on the second floor, structural supports and foundations strengthened or added, a kitchen, pantry, privy, and storage sheds added in the rear, and most important of all, electricity and indoor plumbing were installed.





A great picture of bldg 3 taken in the early 40's. It measured 55 wide, 32 deep, and each side had a parlor, dining room, kitchen, laundry, with bedrooms upstairs. Sad to say, it was demolished in 1961, 98 years after its construction. It had deteriorated to such an extent it was too costly to repair.

These single shot rifles were army issue and are the ones used by the soldiers when Fort Boise was established in 1863. It was years later when Congress finally authorized repeating rifles, giving up the idea that ammunition would just be wasted if our soldiers were given repeating rifles.



Price of groceries in Boise, summer of 1880

dried apples	17cents a pound
beans	9
hams	17
salt	6
crushed sugar	20
bacon, side of	15
java coffee	37
cheese	33
china rice	15
lard 10 lb cans	1.50 each

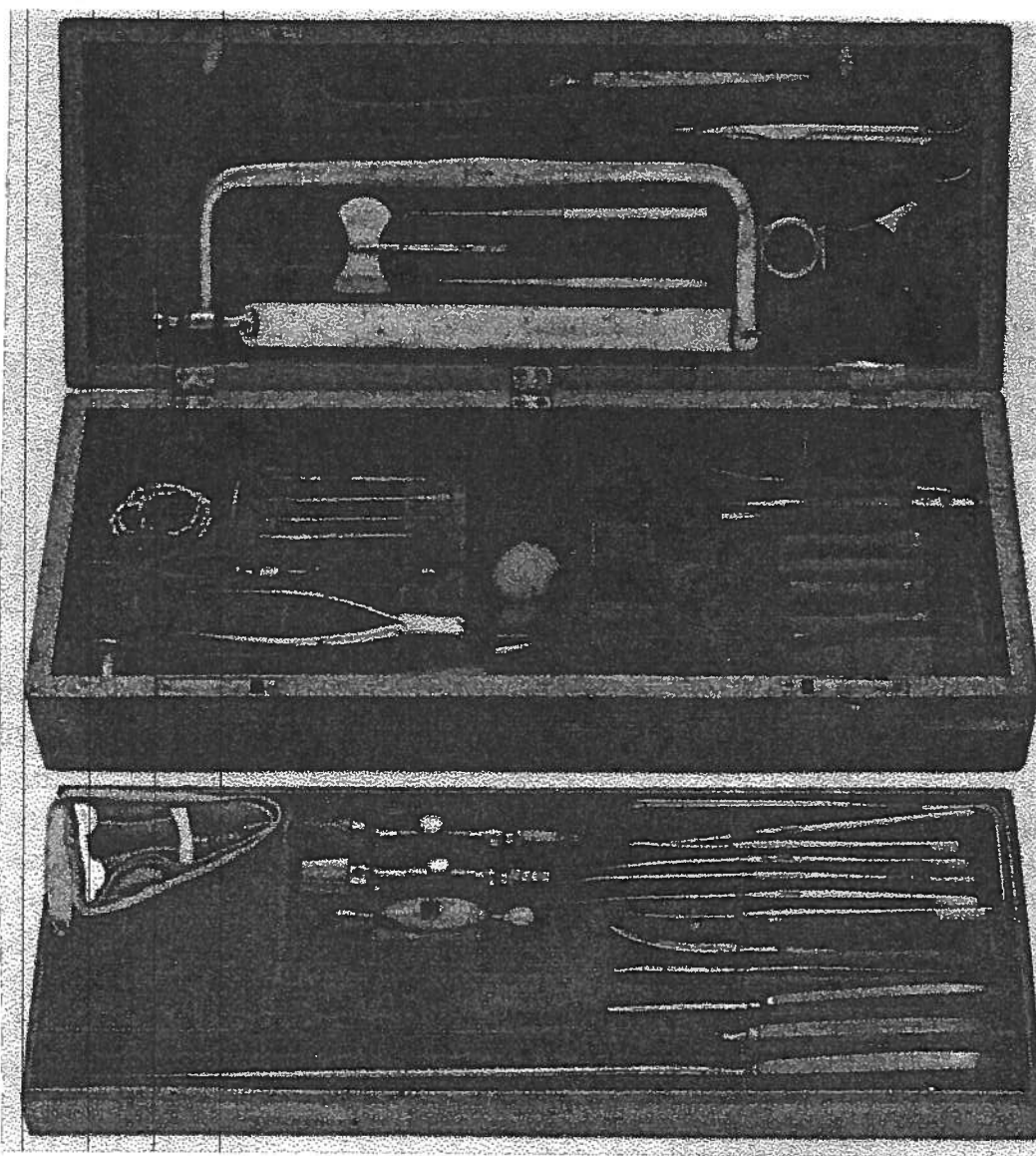


Another picture of bldg 3, with its little porch addition. Now in this spot on "Officers Row" along with the same tree and fire hydrant is the Behavioral Health bldg, #114. Built in 2001 it houses all the Mental Health, Substance Abuse, PTSD, and IPCC clinics in a roomy 17,500 square foot home.



Any history of Fort Boise must include the medical treatment available for wounded soldiers.

Surgeons joining the Army during this time, young and old, experienced a curriculum of amputation for frostbite, fractures or dislocations, and gunshot wounds using the basic instruments furnished by the Army. These instruments consisted of a bone saw similar to the modern day hacksaw; various sizes of scalpels, hooks, scissors, needles, and thread for sutures; and the skull-piercing trepans. Sterilization and anesthetics were mediocre at the post and almost non-existent in the field. Survival for a wounded man was less than 50%, and it was 0% if the problem involved the abdomen. For a soldier experiencing advanced delirium tremens (DTs) -- appropriately nicknamed "payday casualties" -- the treatment was morphine. In the 1880's, no less than 4% of American soldiers were listed as alcoholics. This figure would have been much higher except for the fact that nothing was reported except when the soldier was in grave condition and going through the DTs.

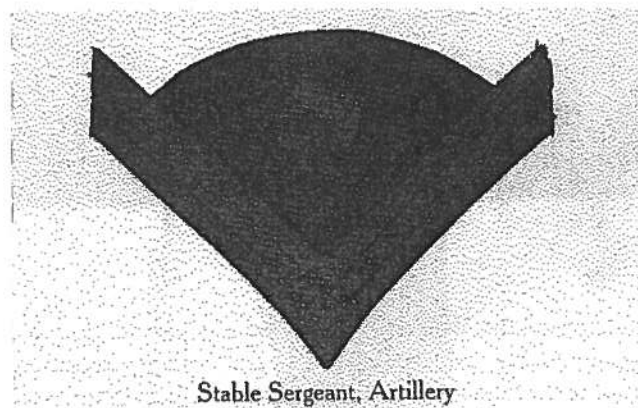
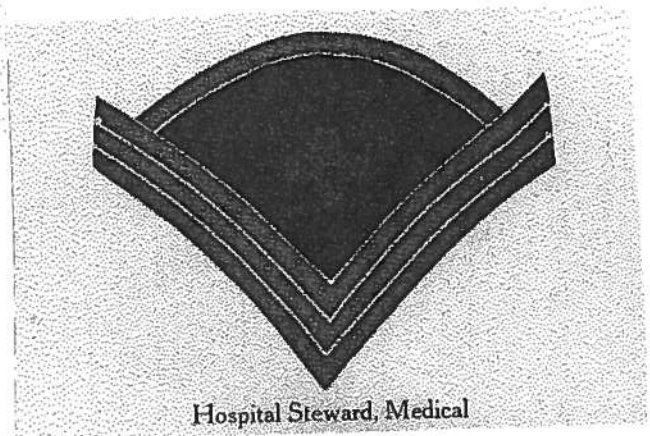


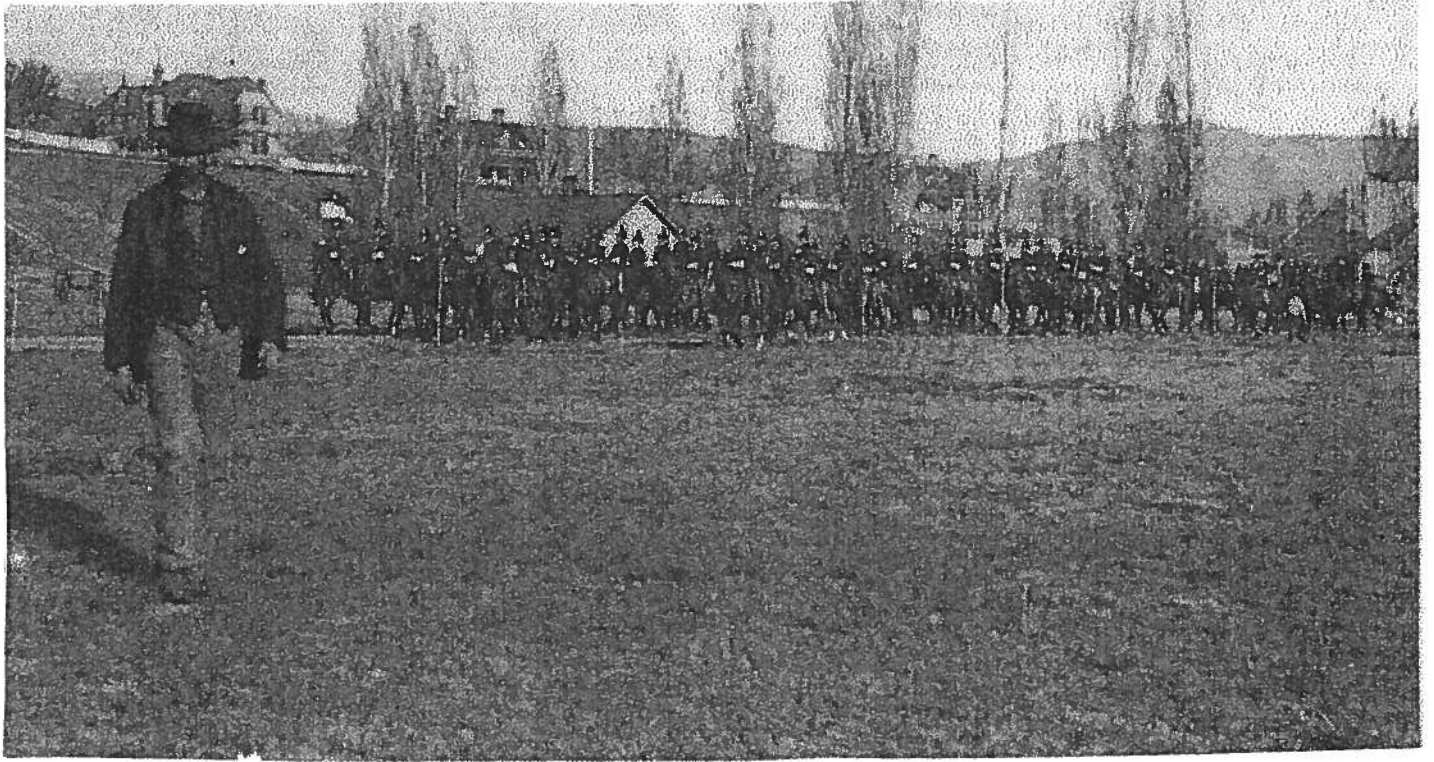
A standard 1800's surgery kit that included a bone saw, bone-piercing trepans and scalpels

A typical activity for officers and their family in the 1800's were polo matches on the military posts. Boise barracks was no exception, inviting the city elite to join them. This picture was taken late 1890's during a match, in the area where the Elks rehab facility's now located. The civilians and soldiers nor driver are identified.



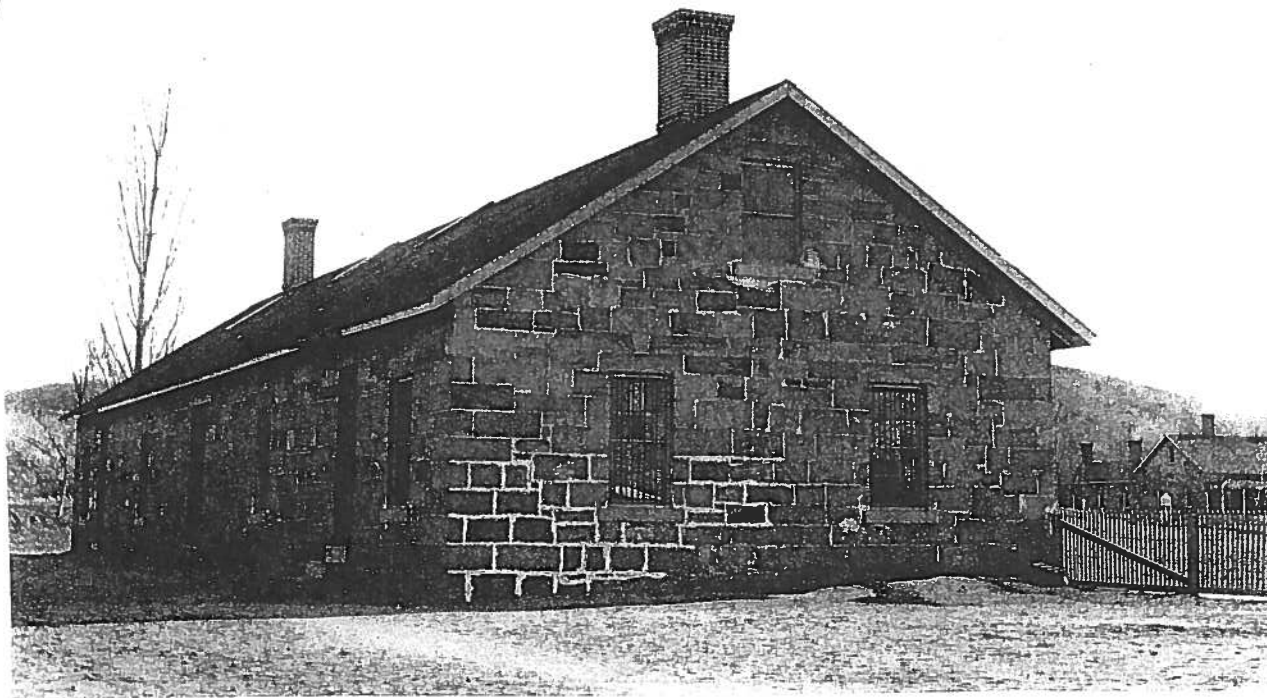
Soldiers shoulder patches, vintage late 1800's

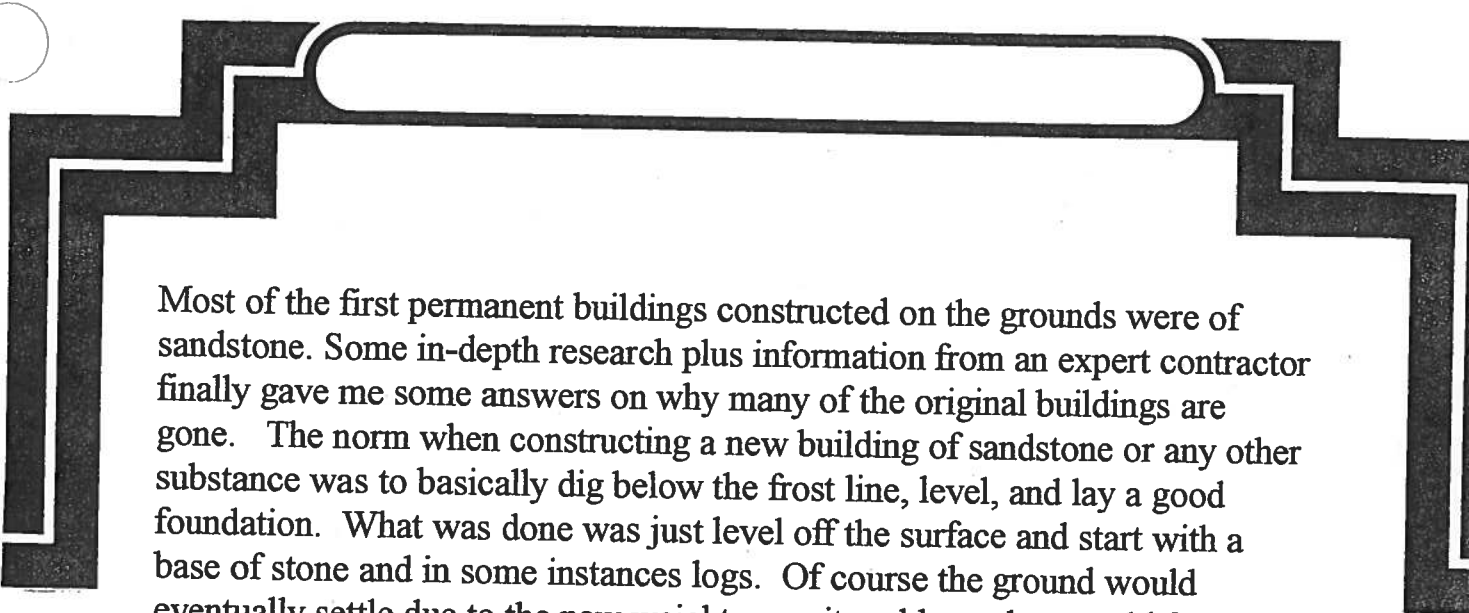





A magnificent shot of the cavalry in full dress on the troop parade ground, the area now occupied by bldg 85 outpatient clinic and parking. The sandstone building behind the soldiers is the Guardhouse. Immediately above is "Officers Row" and from left to right is the new bldg 5 commanders quarters, bldg 1 ex-commanders quarters, bldg 3 single officers duplex (hidden behind the trees) and the post Surgeons bldg 4 with its new addition. The civilian is unidentified. This picture taken late 1890's.

Building 6, finished in the spring of 1864 housed the quartermaster's store. Its size of 30 by 100 feet was home to many thru the years, including commissary stores, Regional offices, Pharmacy, Personnel, Mental Health, and at present the Eye Clinic. The story goes that one of the rear windows was where the soldiers stood in line to receive their monthly pay and no shooting was allowed thru the front windows for wild game. Spearing salmon in Cottonwood creek that run in front of bldg 6 was a past time for soldiers and a welcome addition their diet with the post commanders approval.





Most of the first permanent buildings constructed on the grounds were of sandstone. Some in-depth research plus information from an expert contractor finally gave me some answers on why many of the original buildings are gone. The norm when constructing a new building of sandstone or any other substance was to basically dig below the frost line, level, and lay a good foundation. What was done was just level off the surface and start with a base of stone and in some instances logs. Of course the ground would eventually settle due to the new weight upon it, cold weather would freeze any moisture in the ground area causing "frost heaves" which would create cracks in the stone, loosen the mortar plus shift the entire structure. Unless constant maintenance was performed, the building would eventually crack, crumble, and collapse. If fire were involved on any of the interior or the roof, the heat would crack the sandstone and turn the mortar to powder. Building 1 has been shored up with a new foundation of cement and steel beams, bldg 4 is in need of some serious but very expensive renovation and bldg 6 has received the maintenance it needs allowing it to survive. In addition, all the buildings built in the 1800's had wood shingled roofs and numerous fireplaces for heating and cooking. A very dangerous combination considering there was no fire department at the time. As time went by, one by one the sandstone buildings caught fire, or were beyond repair, and removed with the exception of bldg 1, 4, and 6. New structures were built with brick from the local brickyards along with proper foundations this time, such as bldg 13.

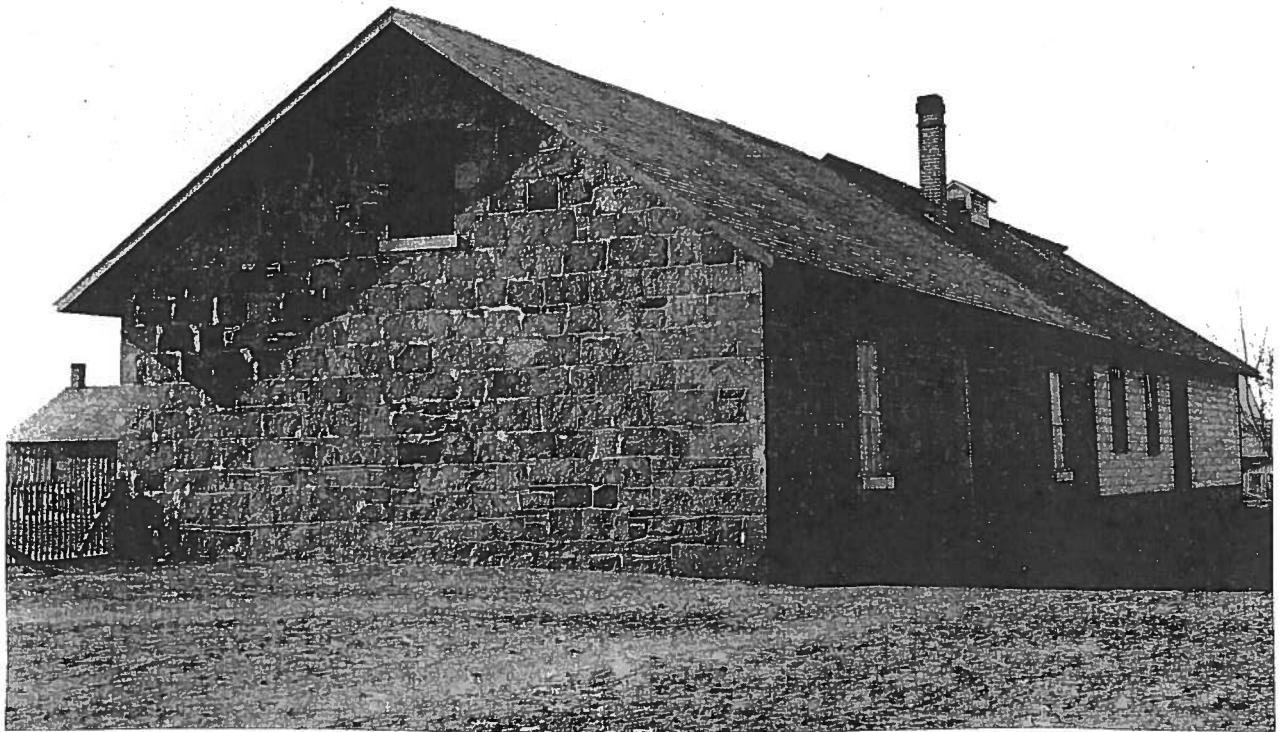




A great interior view of building 6 when it was the recreation facility for veterans, and a winter shot taken in early 2002.



This remarkable picture of building 7 was the exact twin to building 6 located a short distance away. Built entirely of sandstone as the post storehouse, a fire destroyed half of it. Rebuilt with wood and a cement foundation, both sections lasted until the 50's when it was demolished.



This sandstone building has been identified as guardhouse, library, post exchange, and commissary store. Using background references, maps, but not the global positioning system, I was able to accurately identify this structure as one of the guardhouses on post. This one is situated facing the parade ground, its back towards Boise's north end. It had many temporary residents, both military and civilian according to records. This area now occupied by bldg 85-outpatient clinic.

